

Sex Preference and Fertility in Myanglung Municipality, Tehrathum, Nepal

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Abstract	Article Info
Sex preference, particularly son preference, has long influenced marriage, fertility, family size, and contraceptive behavior in many South Asian societies. This study examines the relationship between sex preference and fertility in Myanglung Municipality, Tehrathum District, Nepal. A descriptive case-study design was employed using data collected through a 2025 household survey of 36 households in Ward No. 2, complemented by demographic and theoretical literature. The surveyed households comprised 117 individuals, including 57 males and 60 females. Data were collected on respondents' age, education, occupation, marital status, caste or ethnicity, household income, reproductive history, preferred sex of the first child, and decision-making authority regarding fertility. The findings reveal that 66.66% of respondents preferred a son as their first child, while 33.34% preferred a daughter. Fertility decisions were influenced by patriarchal family structures, economic security, lineage continuation, religious beliefs, gendered household roles, educational attainment, and joint participation of husbands and wives in reproductive decisions. As the data are descriptive and contain some denominator inconsistencies, the findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative. The study concludes that reducing son preference requires strengthening women's empowerment, expanding girls' education and employment opportunities, improving social protection, and promoting gender equality in inheritance, caregiving, and family decision-making. <i>Keywords:</i> sex preference, son preference, fertility behavior, family planning, gender norms, Myanglung Municipality	<i>Email</i> prakash.dhungana523@gmail.com <i>Article History</i> Received: May 23, 2026 Accepted: July 28, 2026 Published: August 06, 2026 <i>Cite</i> Dhungana, P. K. (2026). Sex preference and fertility in myanglung municipality, tehrathum, Nepal. <i>Intellectual Journal of Academic Research (IJAR)</i>, 4(1), 91–100. https://doi.org/10.3126/ijar.v4i1.98347

Introduction

Fertility behavior is a central component of population change. It includes not only the number of children born to a woman or couple, but also the timing of births, the interval between births, the use or non-use of contraception, and decisions about whether to continue childbearing. These decisions are influenced by biological conditions,

household resources, access to health services, education, employment, marriage patterns, and social expectations. One important but often underexamined influence is sex preference—the desire for a particular sex composition of children.

Sex preference is not simply a private wish. In societies where family identity, property, ritual

obligations, and old-age support are organized around gender, parental preferences can shape reproductive behavior. A couple that wants at least one son may continue childbearing after reaching its preferred total family size if earlier births have produced only daughters. Conversely, couples who have achieved their preferred sex composition may adopt contraception earlier or maintain longer birth intervals. In this way, sex preference can affect completed fertility, parity progression, contraceptive demand, and the distribution of family resources.

Nepal has experienced major social and demographic change during the last several decades. Fertility has declined, literacy has expanded, health services have improved, and internal and international migration have altered household economies. Nevertheless, patriarchal family structures and gendered expectations continue to influence marriage, inheritance, residence after marriage, care for elderly parents, and participation in household decision-making. Sons may be regarded as successors of the family line, providers of support in old age, and performers of religious or funeral rites. Daughters may be valued for emotional companionship, household assistance, and care work, but their contributions are often interpreted differently because they are expected to marry and establish households elsewhere.

Myanglung Municipality, the administrative center of Tehrathum District in Koshi Province, provides a useful setting for examining these issues. The municipality combines semi-urban facilities with the cultural and economic characteristics of Nepal's eastern hills. It includes communities from different caste and ethnic groups, including Limbu, Chhetri, Bahun, Tamang, Dalit, and other populations. Residents have increasing access to schools, roads, health services, markets, and communication technologies, yet traditional expectations surrounding marriage, family continuity, and gender roles remain significant. These overlapping influences make Myanglung an appropriate location for a localized study of sex preference and fertility.

The present article is an edited and methodologically clarified version of a small-scale study conducted in Ward No. 2 of Myanglung Municipality. It does not claim to provide a statistically representative estimate for the entire municipality or for Nepal. Rather, it documents reported local patterns and places them in conversation with established demographic theory. The central concern is whether the desire for a particular sex of child appears to influence reproductive intentions and family decision-making, and how this desire interacts with education, livelihood, ethnicity, household authority, and perceived economic security.

Statement of the Problem

Nepal's fertility transition has reduced the average number of children born to women, but a lower desired family size does not automatically eliminate sex preference. When couples want a small family and simultaneously prefer a son, the birth of a daughter may create pressure for another pregnancy. The result can be a larger completed family than originally intended, shorter birth intervals, delayed contraceptive adoption, or emotional and material discrimination among children. Such outcomes are not inevitable, but they are plausible pathways through which gender norms influence fertility.

The problem is especially important in communities undergoing rapid social change. Education and migration may weaken traditional norms by increasing exposure to alternative family models and by changing the economic value of children. At the same time, migration can produce new forms of insecurity. Families may continue to depend on sons for inheritance, residence, care of parents, and ritual responsibilities even when sons are absent for employment. Similarly, rising education does not guarantee gender equality if household authority, property ownership, and care responsibilities remain male-dominated.

Available national and regional studies have examined son preference, gender inequality, family planning, and fertility decline in Nepal

and South Asia. However, the operation of these processes may differ across ecological zones, ethnic communities, and settlement types. There is limited localized evidence from Myanglung Municipality. Without local evidence, planners and service providers may assume that national fertility trends adequately describe the experiences of households in the municipality. A small area study cannot resolve this gap by itself, but it can identify relevant questions and provide an initial description of local attitudes.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between sex preference and fertility behavior among households in Ward No. 2 of Myanglung Municipality.

Sex preference refers to the desire for children of a particular sex or for a particular combination of sons and daughters. It is distinct from the biological probability of a child being male or female. Parents may express a preference before a birth, after one or more births, or in relation to an ideal family composition. A preference may be weak and symbolic, or it may influence concrete behavior such as continued childbearing, contraceptive use, prenatal decision-making, or investment in children.

The demographic significance of sex preference was recognized in early comparative fertility research. World Fertility Survey data from the 1970s showed that son preference was present in a number of Asian societies, including Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, and Jordan. Arnold (1985) developed approaches for estimating how preferences for children's sex could influence fertility and family planning. The basic logic is that couples who have not achieved their desired sex composition may behave differently from couples who consider their family composition complete (Arnold et al., 1975).

The value-of-children perspective is also relevant. Children may provide economic, social,

psychological, and cultural benefits, while also requiring substantial costs. In a largely agrarian or insecure economy, sons may be valued for their expected contribution to farm work, wage earning, household protection, inheritance, and support in old age. Daughters may provide domestic labor and emotional support, but patrilocal marriage can reduce the expectation that they will remain available to care for parents. These perceived benefits and costs are not fixed. They change with education, labor markets, migration, social security, urbanization, and the distribution of unpaid care work.

Caldwell's theory of intergenerational wealth flows explains fertility as a response to the direction of resource transfers between parents and children. Where children are perceived to provide economic and social returns to parents, fertility may remain relatively high. Where the costs of raising and educating children are high and children are expected to become economically independent, fertility tends to decline. A gender preference can operate within this framework by assigning different expected returns to sons and daughters. If sons are perceived as more reliable providers of future support, a couple may continue childbearing until a son is born, even when the desired total number of children is small.

Gender and fertility research in Nepal has repeatedly shown that family organization and gender inequality matter. Son preference has been linked to family lineage, religious rites, inheritance, residence patterns, and expectations of support in later life. Studies have also emphasized that son preference can coexist with declining fertility. In fact, the combination of a small-family norm and a strong preference for one son may intensify pressure on families whose first or second child is a daughter. Education is generally associated with lower fertility and greater contraceptive use, but its influence on son preference is not uniform. Schooling may reduce preference by exposing individuals to gender-equal values, while families with greater resources may

simultaneously gain access to technologies that allow stronger sex selection. Therefore, education should be understood as one factor within a broader institutional and economic context.

The conceptual framework for this study links three groups of explanatory factors to sex preference and fertility behavior. Social factors include education, occupation, ethnicity, religion, family structure, gender roles, and attitudes toward daughters and sons. Economic factors include land, income regularity, employment, household dependency, and expectations of old-age support. Demographic factors include age, sex, marital status, parity, family size, and the sex composition of existing children. These factors may influence the perceived value of children and the authority structure within the household. Sex preference may then affect the desired family size, continuation of childbearing, contraceptive adoption, and birth spacing. The relationship is reciprocal: fertility experiences can also modify preferences over time.

Methodology

Study Design and Setting

The study used a descriptive case-study design. The field component was conducted in Ward No. 2 of Myanglung Municipality, Tehrathum District, in 2025. Myanglung is situated in the eastern hill region of Nepal and functions as the district headquarters. The municipality has a mixed semi-urban character. It provides better access to schools, health facilities, roads, administrative services, and markets than many surrounding rural settlements, but households continue to experience agricultural dependence, seasonal employment, migration, and traditional kinship arrangements.

Population, Sample, and Respondents

According to the figures reported in the original study, Myanglung Municipality had 4,872 households and a population of 18,750 in the 2011 census, including 9,114 males and 9,636 females. Ward No. 2 was reported to have 362 households and a population of 1,326, including 609 males and 717 females. Because of limitations of time and

resources, the study did not survey all households. Thirty-six households were selected for the field survey. The reported household population represented in the descriptive tables was 117 persons, consisting of 57 males and 60 females.

The reproductive component focused primarily on married women aged 15–49 and their spouses, while some questions about household characteristics were answered by other adult household members. The source document also reports 127 respondents in one decision-making table. Because this number exceeds the reported population of 117, the decision-making table is treated as a separately reported response total rather than as a directly comparable population count. This inconsistency is retained as a limitation and should be resolved through verification of the original questionnaires before journal publication.

Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared in English and translated into Nepali. It contained questions on age, sex, education, occupation, marital status, caste or ethnicity, household economic condition, reproductive experience, preferred sex of the first child, and the person who participated in decisions about the number of children. The questionnaire combined closed-ended items with opportunities for respondents to explain their views. Interviews were conducted during household visits, including morning and evening visits when both spouses were available.

Data Processing and Analysis

The original study reports the use of SPSS to tabulate frequencies and percentages. The present edited article interprets the available information as descriptive evidence. No claim is made about statistical significance, causality, or municipality-wide prevalence because the sample is small, apparently non-probability based, and not accompanied by inferential tests. Percentages are reproduced from the reported tables where possible. In cases where the numerator and denominator do not match, the discrepancy is explicitly noted rather than silently corrected.

Ethical and Interpretive Considerations

The article does not contain personally identifying information. Nevertheless, a journal submission should provide a formal statement regarding informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and approval or permission from the relevant institution or local authority. Because sex preference is a sensitive topic, respondents should not be pressured to disclose private reproductive decisions. The study should also avoid language that portrays any caste, ethnicity, religion, or gender group as inherently discriminatory. Preferences are shaped by institutions and social conditions, not by the essential character of a community.

Table 1

Age and Sex Composition of the Study Population

Age group	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	Total n (%)
0–14	20 (35.08)	22 (36.66)	42 (35.89)
15–59	32 (56.14)	35 (58.34)	67 (57.26)
60 and above	5 (8.78)	3 (5.00)	8 (6.85)
Total	57 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	117 (100.00)

Education

The reported literacy rate was 86.32%, with 101 literate and 16 illiterate persons. The educational distribution indicates that the largest group had primary education, followed by lower secondary education. A further 16.25% were reported to have bachelor's-level education or higher. These figures suggest that the study area has a relatively substantial educational base, although the presence of adults with little or no formal schooling remains important for service delivery.

Table 2

Educational Status of the Study Population

Educational category	Number	Percent
Literate	101	86.32
Illiterate	16	13.68

Results and Discussion

Age and Sex Composition

The study population consisted of 117 persons. Males numbered 57 and females 60. Children aged 0–14 represented 35.89% of the population, persons aged 15–59 represented 57.26%, and persons aged 60 years or older represented 6.85%. The relatively large share of children indicates continuing dependency needs, while the majority working-age group suggests that household livelihood and migration decisions may be important influences on family welfare. The sex distribution was relatively balanced, with slightly more females than males in the reported population.

Education can influence sex preference through several mechanisms. It may expand knowledge of contraception, increase women's bargaining power, delay marriage, and alter expectations about daughters' economic and social roles. However, education alone cannot eliminate son preference when inheritance, residence, ritual obligations, and old-age support remain organized around sons. The results should therefore be interpreted as evidence of educational opportunity, not as proof that education has already transformed gender norms.

Educational category	Number	Percent
Total	117	100.00
Primary level	26	22.22
Lower secondary	24	20.51
Secondary	13	11.11
SLC/SEE pass	12	10.25
Intermediate	15	12.83
Bachelor's and above	19	16.25
Informal education	8	6.83
Total	117	100.00

Occupation and Livelihood

The occupational profile shows a mixed household economy. Students constituted 22.22% of the reported population and housewives 21.36%. Own-account agriculture accounted for 20.51%, while wage labor in agriculture and sharecropping together accounted for 8.54%. Services, business, industry, and non-agricultural labor represented additional sources of income. The data indicate that agriculture remains important, but household livelihoods are not exclusively agricultural.

Occupation is relevant to fertility because it affects the opportunity cost of childbearing, household income, and the perceived usefulness of children's labor. In subsistence and semi-subsistence households, sons may be valued as future agricultural workers or income earners. In households dependent on salaried employment or migration, the economic calculation may be different, although sons may still be valued for lineage and old-age support. The occupational data therefore support a multidimensional interpretation of sex preference.

Marital Status and Ethnic Composition

Among the 117 persons, 64 were reported as married, 44 unmarried, five widowed or widower, and four separated or divorced. The marital distribution is important because fertility decisions are concentrated among married couples, while unmarried and older respondents may contribute

information about broader household norms rather than current childbearing intentions.

The reported ethnic composition was 41.02% Limbu, 20.51% Chhetri, 14.52% Bahun, 6.83% Tamang, 3.41% Damai, 2.56% Kami, and 11.11% other groups. This diversity is analytically important. Gender norms may be shared across communities, but the meanings of lineage, residence, inheritance, marriage, and ritual practice can vary. The small sample does not permit reliable comparison among ethnic groups, and no group should be interpreted as having a single uniform attitude.

Household Income Regularity

Respondents were asked about the number of months in which their households had income during the year. Thirteen households, or 36.11%, reported income in all twelve months. Twelve households, or 33.33%, reported income in eleven months, seven households, or 19.44%, reported ten months, and four households, or 11.12%, reported nine months or fewer. These figures suggest that income insecurity affects a meaningful proportion of households.

Income regularity may influence fertility in two opposing ways. Insecure households may prefer fewer children because the direct costs of food, schooling, and health care are difficult to manage. At the same time, households without formal social protection may continue to value sons as future sources of support. Thus, economic

insecurity can reduce desired family size while maintaining pressure to have at least one son.

Reproductive Experience and Desired Sex of the First Child

In the reproductive table, 28 respondents were reported to have given birth to a child and five were reported not to have given birth. These responses total 33 rather than 36, indicating missing or invalid responses. The valid-response percentage for those who had given birth is therefore 84.85% if calculated from 33 responses, although the original table reports 77.77% using a denominator of 36. This discrepancy illustrates why the raw questionnaires should be checked before formal publication.

The table on desired sex of the first child reports 24 respondents preferring a son and 12 preferring a daughter, for a total of 36. Thus, the reported distribution is 66.66% son preference and 33.34% daughter preference. This is the clearest indication in the available data that son preference was more common than daughter preference in the study group. The result should not be interpreted as a biological sex ratio or as evidence of sex-selective practice. It measures stated preference, and stated preference may not always translate into behavior.

Several explanations may account for the preference for sons. Respondents may expect sons to continue the family name, inherit property, perform funeral rites, remain connected to the natal household, and provide support in old age. Some may also view sons as economically productive in farming or wage employment. Daughters may be valued for affection, household assistance, and care, but their expected movement to a husband's household can reduce the perceived long-term return to their natal family. These beliefs are socially produced and can change as women gain education, property rights, employment, and public recognition.

Decision-Making About the Number of Children

The reported decision-making table assigns decisions to husbands, wives, fathers-in-law,

mothers-in-law, both spouses, and respondents for whom the question was not applicable because they were unmarried, widowed, divorced, or otherwise outside current reproductive decision-making. The largest category was the non-applicable group, reported as 41.74% of 127 responses. Among the remaining categories, husbands were reported as sole decision-makers in 19.68%, wives in 17.33%, both spouses in 14.18%, fathers-in-law in 3.93%, and mothers-in-law in 3.14%.

These data suggest that reproductive decision-making is not exclusively an individual choice. Husbands appear to have a somewhat larger reported role than wives, while parents-in-law retain a smaller but visible role. Joint decision-making is present but does not represent the majority of all reported responses. Because the denominator of 127 is inconsistent with the reported study population, these percentages should be viewed as descriptive indications rather than precise estimates.

The distribution nevertheless supports an important interpretation. Fertility counseling that addresses only women may be insufficient in settings where husbands and senior family members influence the number and sex composition of children. Family planning programs should engage couples together while also protecting women's autonomous and confidential access to reproductive health services. Messages should emphasize shared responsibility, informed choice, healthy birth spacing, and the equal value of daughters and sons.

The findings are consistent with a broader demographic pattern in which fertility declines while son preference persists. A family may desire two children but prefer that at least one be a son. If the first child is a daughter, the couple may continue childbearing; if the second child is also a daughter, the pressure may be even stronger. This process can increase parity progression and reduce the extent to which fertility decline translates into gender equality.

The reported preference for a son as the first child should be interpreted within the local social structure. In many Nepali households, sons are associated with patrilineal continuity, inheritance, ritual performance, and old-age support. These expectations are reinforced by residence patterns and the perception that daughters will marry out. The preference is therefore not reducible to household income or religious belief alone. It reflects a system in which the social and economic returns to children are distributed unequally by gender.

At the same time, the study area displays factors that may weaken son preference. The reported literacy rate is high, the municipality has access to educational and administrative institutions, and livelihoods include services, business, and migration-related activities. Exposure to schooling, mass media, urban employment, and smaller-family ideals may reduce the intensity of traditional preferences. Women's education may also improve communication with husbands and increase the likelihood of contraceptive use. However, these changes may be gradual, and they may not transform norms unless accompanied by changes in property ownership, employment, social security, and household authority.

The decision-making findings are especially important. If husbands and senior relatives retain substantial influence, women may have limited control over contraception and birth timing even when they personally prefer a smaller family. A woman can be literate and aware of family-planning methods yet unable to use them without agreement from her spouse or family. This gap between knowledge and agency is a central issue in reproductive health research. Programs should therefore measure not only awareness of contraception but also who controls money, who decides when to seek care, who decides whether another child should be born, and whether women can refuse sex or negotiate birth spacing safely.

The study also highlights the role of economic insecurity. Households with seasonal or irregular income may experience a conflict between the

high cost of raising children and the expectation that sons will provide future security. Improving social protection for older persons, expanding decent employment for women and men, and ensuring equal educational opportunities may reduce the perceived necessity of relying on sons. When parents can expect support from pensions, community networks, health insurance, and savings, the economic rationale for son preference may weaken.

The evidence does not support a simple claim that education automatically removes sex preference. Education is more likely to be effective when it changes the opportunity structure of girls and women. If daughters receive education but remain excluded from inheritance, paid employment, and household decision-making, parents may continue to perceive sons as more valuable. In contrast, visible examples of educated and economically independent daughters can change community expectations. The policy objective should therefore be gender-equitable development, not only higher literacy.

Finally, the findings demonstrate the importance of data quality. The source material contains different denominators, including 117 persons, 36 households, 33 valid reproductive responses, 36 preference responses, and 127 decision-making responses. Such inconsistencies are common in small field studies but must be resolved before a journal makes claims about prevalence or association. A stronger follow-up study should use a clearly defined sampling frame, a household listing, unique respondent identifiers, validated skip patterns, and a data dictionary. It should distinguish household members from eligible women, spouses, and decision-makers. This would make it possible to estimate associations between sex preference and parity, education, wealth, contraceptive use, and family size with appropriate statistical methods.

The relevant for researching sex preference and fertility. Vulnerable populations and labor markets (Ghimire et al., 2025), occupational health and social determinants of health in Nepali institutions

and workplaces (Gautam et al., 2025; Mishra, 2024; Mishra & Shrestha, 2017; Mishra & Aithal, 2021), and risk assessment and safety practices in infrastructure projects (Lama et al., 2019; Mishra et al., 2019; Mishra et al., 2022). These bodies of work provide useful methodological models (mixed methods, field surveys, risk-assessment frameworks) and emphasize socio-economic and structural determinants that shape demographic behaviours.

Research on sex preference and fertility in a Himalayan municipality like Myanglung should situate findings in wider social determinants: economic insecurity, labor migration, education, occupational hazards, and gendered livelihoods.

Conclusions

This study examined sex preference and fertility in a small sample from Ward No. 2 of Myanglung Municipality. The reported evidence indicates that preference for a son was more common than preference for a daughter as the desired first child. The study also shows that reproductive decisions are embedded in household and community institutions. Education, occupation, income regularity, ethnicity, marital status, family structure, gender roles, and perceived old-age security all contribute to the meaning attached to sons and daughters.

The results should not be generalized to the entire municipality because the sample is small and the data contain unresolved inconsistencies. Nevertheless, the study provides a useful local indication that declining fertility does not necessarily eliminate gendered reproductive preferences. Couples may want fewer children while still seeking a son, and this combination can influence the continuation of childbearing and the timing of contraception. The reported role of husbands and senior family members further indicates that reproductive health interventions should not treat fertility as an isolated individual decision.

Reducing son preference requires a broad social response. Local governments, schools,

health workers, civil society organizations, and community leaders should promote equal value for daughters and sons, strengthen girls' education and employment, improve women's access to property and financial resources, expand confidential family-planning services, and engage men in reproductive responsibility. Social protection and elder-care systems can reduce the perceived dependence on sons. Public communication should challenge the idea that family honor, lineage, or religious duty depends exclusively on male children.

A future study should collect primary data from a larger and scientifically selected sample across several wards of Myanglung Municipality. It should combine a structured household survey with qualitative interviews involving women, men, adolescents, older persons, health workers, and community leaders. The study should measure desired family size, actual parity, sex composition of existing children, contraceptive history, birth intervals, inheritance expectations, migration, and household decision-making. Such research would provide stronger evidence on whether son preference is declining, changing form, or continuing to influence fertility in the municipality.

Policy and Program Implications

The findings suggest five practical directions. First, family-planning services should be couple-oriented but preserve women's confidential access to contraception and counseling. Second, communication programs should address the reasons behind son preference, including old-age security, inheritance, family continuity, and ritual obligations, rather than relying only on general slogans about equality. Third, local authorities should support girls' education, women's employment, equal inheritance, and protection from gender-based discrimination. Fourth, male engagement should be integrated into reproductive-health programs because husbands and senior men may influence fertility decisions. Fifth, local research systems should improve the quality of ward-level demographic data so that policies are based on verified denominators and clearly defined populations.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. The sample is small and restricted to one ward, so the results cannot be generalized to Myanglung Municipality or Nepal. The sampling procedure is not described in sufficient detail to establish representativeness. The study relies primarily on descriptive frequencies and does not report confidence intervals, tests of association, or multivariable models. Some tables contain inconsistent denominators and percentages, including the reproductive-experience table and the decision-making table. The article also lacks detailed information about informed consent and ethical approval. Finally, stated preference may differ from actual reproductive behavior, and the cross-sectional design cannot establish whether sex preference caused higher fertility. These limitations do not invalidate the study as an exploratory case study, but they require cautious interpretation and verification of the original records before peer-reviewed publication.

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